



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON DC 20420

SEP 15 2010

**MEMORANDUM FOR UNDER SECRETARIES, ASSISTANT SECRETARIES, OTHER
KEY OFFICIALS, AND FIELD FACILITY DIRECTORS**

SUBJECT: 2010 National Disability Employment Awareness Month

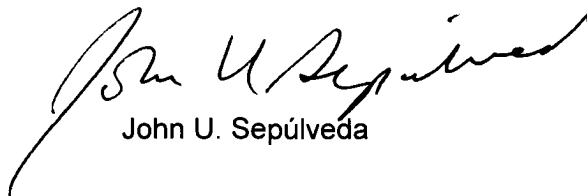
The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) proudly joins the Nation in the observance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. The theme for 2010, "Talent Has No Boundaries: Workforce Diversity Includes Workers with Disabilities," reminds us that people with disabilities are an integral part of our diverse talent pool. They represent an array of professions, races, national origins, and age groups.

The VA is fortunate to witness the talent and drive exhibited by our Veterans and employees with disabilities. We are reminded that people who have severe disabilities can and do contribute to the success of VA.

As of June 2010, VA's permanent workforce was 270,302 employees, of whom 4,242 (1.51 percent) have some type of severe disability. However, Secretary Shinseki indicated in his September 7, 2010, memorandum, "Employment of Individuals with Disabilities," we can do better. Accordingly, I urge managers and supervisors to kick off National Disability Employment Awareness Month by highlighting the information and guidance in the attachments to this memo, including the 2 percent hiring goal established by Secretary Shinseki, strategies for increasing employment and retention of individuals with disabilities, and information on making the workplace fully accessible.

As we continue efforts to emphasize and demonstrate VA's support for maximizing potential for all people with severe disabilities, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion will monitor and report to Secretary Shinseki on a quarterly basis, the progress and achievements in hiring, advancing, and retaining employees with severe disabilities.

Thank you for your support in this important initiative.


John U. Sepúlveda

Attachments



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

September 7, 2010

**MEMORANDUM FOR UNDER SECRETARIES, ASSISTANT SECRETARIES, OTHER
KEY OFFICIALS, AND FIELD FACILITY DIRECTORS**

SUBJECT: Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to maintaining our position as a leader in the Federal Government in hiring and maintaining a diverse workforce that reflects the great diversity in America. That diversity includes people with disabilities. We are also determined to fully support President Obama's Executive Order of July 26, 2010, to increase Federal employment of individuals with disabilities, especially those with serious, targeted disabilities.

Practically speaking, targeted disabilities include deafness, blindness, partial and total paralysis, missing limbs, distorted limbs or spine, mental disabilities, and convulsive disorders. VA is already doing well among the Cabinet-level Departments in the employment of individuals with targeted disabilities, particularly disabled Veterans. I especially commend the Veterans Benefits Administration, which has the highest ratio of employees with targeted disabilities – 2.36 percent of their permanent workforce. The Department's overall ratio is at 1.47 percent. Although this is better than the government-wide average of less than one percent, I am confident that we can do better.

As a Department, we are in a unique position to accomplish the goals of the President's Executive Order while simultaneously meeting those we have previously established in VA's strategic plan goals for hiring a greater percentage of Veterans, including those who have been disabled either in service or after their period of service.

Therefore, I am setting a goal of 2 percent for hiring persons with targeted disabilities in fiscal year (FY) 2011, in accordance with the VA Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan. And as we increase our recruiting and hiring of Veterans and other Americans with targeted disabilities, we must also work harder to retain these employees.

Tantamount to the success of this initiative is your support and commitment. I am asking each of you to personally place emphasis on the importance of hiring a greater percentage of qualified people with disabilities and targeted disabilities, especially those who are Veterans.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion will monitor and keep me advised, on a quarterly basis, of VA's progress in the hiring, advancement, and retention of persons with targeted disabilities. The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration will issue additional guidance and information no later than September 15, 2010. Their point of contact for further information on this initiative is Christy Compton (202) 461-4131.

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Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

I appreciate your support of the President's order and VA's important goals. Making significant progress in this initiative is good for Americans with disabilities, good for Veterans, and good for our country.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Eric K. Shinseki". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Eric K. Shinseki

Information on Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Individuals with Disabilities

HIRING: In order to comply with the Secretary's "Employment of Individuals with Disabilities" memorandum dated September 7, 2010, each facility will need to recruit and hire qualified individuals with targeted disabilities. The targeted disabilities, as established by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, are deafness, blindness, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, missing limbs, distortion of limbs or spine, mental illness, mental retardation, and convulsive disorders. These individuals can be hired competitively through the regular process or noncompetitively via the Schedule A excepted hiring authority. Some Veterans have targeted disabilities; they can be hired via Schedule A or various Veterans hiring authorities. Schedule A allows the hiring of an individual without issuing a job announcement, so the process is very quick. For information on Schedule A, please go to the Employment section of VA's People with Disabilities Web page at <<http://www.diversity.hr.va.gov/disabilities.htm>>

RECRUITMENT: To ensure persons with disabilities receive consideration for active vacancies, VA facilities need to expand recruitment outreach efforts, utilizing organizations or resources that serve this population, including those at colleges, state disability and vocational rehabilitation offices, and the Employer Assistance and Resources Network. Each college and university will have an office that provides services to students with disabilities. That office can be a good source of potential candidates for employment. The Workforce Recruitment Program is also a good source of qualified candidates.

RETENTION: Expanding our efforts to recruit and hire individuals with targeted disabilities will not achieve the desired results unless we also reduce the attrition rate. Before terminating an employee with a disability, each facility should work with their equal employment opportunity (EEO) office and local reasonable accommodation coordinator (LRAC) to ensure that appropriate and effective accommodations were offered. The Job Accommodation Network at <www.askjan.org> can also provide suggestions. The EEO office and LRAC can contact the National Reasonable Accommodation Coordinator at <<mailto:mnrac@va.gov>> for guidance.

TRAINING: Increased training opportunities will improve retention of employees with targeted disabilities. VA's new ADVANCE initiative provides training options. Supervisors are encouraged to ensure that their employees with disabilities are signed up for training that positions them to be eligible for promotions in their field of expertise. Information on ADVANCE is available at <vaww.va.gov/ADVANCE/>.

CAREER ADVANCEMENT: Providing promotion opportunities is another aspect of retention. VA needs to ensure that our employees with disabilities are given opportunities for career advancement. For this reason, recent college graduates who have targeted disabilities should be hired into career ladder positions. There is an estimated 70 percent unemployment rate for individuals with targeted disabilities, so we can expect to hire people with education but little or no actual job experience. Each facility is encouraged to provide mentors for these new employees so that they will become part of our "One VA."

DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES: The Secretary's memorandum was issued to support the President's Executive Order, "Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities," which was released on July 26, 2010. The Executive order instructs

agencies to increase participation of individuals with disabilities in internships, fellowships, training, and mentoring programs. Each Administration should create a plan that lists the programs offered to employees and the ratio of slots that will be dedicated for employees with disabilities and the ratio of slots for employees with targeted disabilities.

ACCOMMODATION: Reasonable accommodation is a key component in these efforts. VA provides qualified individuals who have disabilities with accommodations that enable them to apply or interview for a position, perform the duties of the job, and enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment. This is another area where VA can make improvements. Accordingly, a centralized fund has been established to reimburse offices for accommodations that are not provided by the U.S. Department of Defense's Computer Accommodations Program. Each facility should have a LRAC in the human resources or EEO office. For additional information on accommodations for individuals with disabilities, please see the People with Disabilities Web page at: <http://www.diversity.hr.va.gov/disabilities.htm>.

ACCESSIBILITY: In addition to providing individual applicants and employees with accommodation, VA has an obligation to ensure that its programs and activities are accessible. The attached information sheet explains this requirement in detail.

RESOURCES: If you have any questions, please contact your local human resources or EEO staff. You may also contact Christy Compton, VA's Disability Program Manager, via email at <mailto:Christy.Compton@va.gov> or at 202-461-4131.

Making Workplace Programs and Activities Accessible for Individuals with Disabilities

Commitment: The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to ensuring its programs and activities are accessible to all individuals, including persons with disabilities. Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. § 791), and implementing regulations, requires VA to provide reasonable accommodation to the known physical and mental limitations of qualified applicants and employees with disabilities, unless it can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the agency's program or the budget of VA as a whole.

Legal Requirement: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. § 794), requires VA to ensure that qualified individuals with disabilities are not excluded from or discriminated against under any VA-conducted programs or activities solely because of their disabilities. VA-conducted programs and activities must be accessible and usable to qualified individuals with disabilities, including any aid, benefit, or service.

Legal Requirement for Information Technology: Additionally, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. § 794d), requires VA to ensure that Electronic and Information Technology purchased, developed, maintained, or used by VA meets the provisions of Section 508, unless an undue burden would be imposed on VA. Section 508's technical standards apply to software applications and operating systems, Web-based Intranet and Internet information and systems, telecommunication products, video and multimedia products, self contained/closed products, and desktop and portable computers.

Section 508 requires that all videos shown by VA have captioning. This includes videos used in training and on the Web site, whether made, purchased, or borrowed by VA. It is advisable to have the captioning turned on when showing a video to large groups. If a video is posted to the Web, or if it is shown to an audience known to include a deaf or hard of hearing employee, the captioning must be turned on.

Programs and Activities: Proactive steps shall be taken to ensure that VA programs and activities are accessible to people with disabilities (e.g., scheduling sign language interpreters, providing meeting handouts in alternate formats, captioning videos, and hosting events in locations that are close to public transportation and accessible to people who use wheelchairs). VA programs and activities include, but are not limited to, events in and outside of VA property, such as meetings, special emphasis observances, announcements of reports or major initiatives, conferences, receptions, office social functions such as retirement celebrations and holiday parties, and training programs.

Interpreter Requirements: ***Please remind individuals responsible for planning departmental events that scheduling sign language interpreters and other program modifications for persons with disabilities is the responsibility of the event sponsor or coordinator.*** When announcing an event or meeting, include an accessibility statement explaining how individuals with disabilities may request a reasonable accommodation or program modification. The following statement is recommended for inclusion in all event announcements:

“The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (or name of the Administration or facility) is committed to providing equal access to this meeting (or event) for all participants. If you need alternative formats or services because of a disability, please contact (name of person) at (telephone number) or via Email (Email address) with your request by close of business (deadline).”

Large groups: Interpreters must be requested and provided for events that are open to large groups of employees or the public and for all events at which the Secretary or Deputy Secretary are scheduled to speak; the coordinator should not wait for requests from employees when it is known that employees who rely on interpreters are expected to be present. For employees with hearing loss who do not know sign language, real time captioning may be appropriate.

Centralized Fund: The Office of Diversity and Inclusion manages a centralized fund to reimburse the cost of accommodations, such as interpreters and captioning, that are not provided by the U.S. Department of Defense’s Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program. For information on the centralized fund and how to request reimbursement, please go to the Disability Accommodations Procedures section of VA’s People with Disabilities Web page at <http://www.diversity.hr.va.gov/disabilities.htm>.

Interactive Process: When appropriate, you may need to engage in an interactive process as stated in VA Handbook 5975.1, “Processing Requests for Reasonable Accommodation from Employees and Applicants with Disabilities” when processing a request for reasonable accommodation. If an individual has raised an accessibility concern or has requested a change due to a medical condition on behalf of himself, herself, or a VA employee or applicant, this request is the first step in an informal interactive process. Using the interactive process will help clarify what the individual may need as appropriate reasonable accommodation. Failure to follow the guidance in the VA Handbook may lead to an unfavorable judgment.

Resources: The local reasonable accommodation coordinator (LRAC) can assist event planners by providing advice on how to make an event accessible. The LRACs can also provide advice on job related reasonable accommodations for VA employees and applicants. Contact your human resources or EEO office for the name of the LRAC serving your area.

Postponement as an Option: If the need for an accommodation was identified in advance and the accommodation is not available at the time of the meeting or event, to ensure equal access for all participants or guests, the event should be delayed or postponed until the accommodation can be made available.

Contact Information: For additional information, you may contact Christy Compton, VA Disability Program Manager, Outreach and Retention Division, Office of Diversity and Inclusion at Christy.Compton@va.gov or 202-461-4131.

Department of Veterans Affairs

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES
FOR
Disability Employment Awareness Month**

Suggested activities include, but are not restricted to the following:

- Announcement by the field facility director requesting that all managers and supervisors recruit and hire qualified individuals, including Veterans, who have targeted disabilities (deafness, blindness, missing limbs, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, mental illness, intellectual impairments, distortion of limbs or spine, and convulsive disorders).
- Seek qualified applicants from the Workforce Recruitment Program <https://wrp.gov/>, the Employer Assistance and Recruitment Network <<http://www.earnworks.com/>>, the office that provides assistance to students with disabilities at Colleges and Universities with appropriate fields of study, and VA's own Veterans Employment Coordination Service <<http://www4.va.gov/vecs/>>.
- Seek ways to provide training and career development opportunities for your employees with disabilities.
- Develop a mentoring program for employees with disabilities at your facility.
- Ensure that employees with disabilities have received effective accommodation that allows them to perform the duties of their job or enjoy the privileges of employment.
- Instruct all supervisors and managers to ensure that requests for accommodation are processed promptly and that a back-up is available in their absence. Ensure that the facility has a local reasonable accommodation coordinator and backup.
- Provide training to managers and supervisors on the Schedule A hiring authority, reasonable accommodation procedures and requirements, barriers to the employment of individuals with targeted disabilities, and the need to provide promotion opportunities as described in Part J of the Management Directive 715. Information can be found on VA's disability Web page at <<http://www.disability.hr.va.gov/disabilities.htm>>.

Office of Human Resources and Administration
Office of Diversity and Inclusion
September 2010